

Testimony in Support
of
S. 2899

By
Tara Lulani McKenzie

Aloha Chairman Nighthorse and distinguished committee members. My name is Tara Lulani McKenzie. I am a Native Hawaiian whose ancestors come from the Kohala region on the big island of Hawai'i. I am the President/CEO of ALU LIKE, Inc. and a member of Senator Akaka's Native Hawaiian Community Working Group. I want to thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on S. 2899. Moreover, I want to honor na aumakua (ancestors) and that which is greater than "we" for the mana (divine guidance) that has been provided regarding this very important matter. My family, friends, and colleagues have spent many hours over the past few months contemplating and discussing this bill.

Within the US, Hawaii is the most ethnically diverse state, and is also the only state in which the majority population is not Caucasian. There are 238,371 Native Hawaiians in the state of Hawaii. (The State of Hawaii Data Book 1997, page 43). There are more than 50,000 Native Hawaiians scattered across the continental United States. We have endured two centuries of injustices; in response there has been decades of organizing and political strife, active formation of sovereignty groups, hundreds of community meetings, numerous votes and elections, and thousands of hours of discussion.

We are now at a crossroads.

We may choose to remain where we are, content with our current situation and oblivious to the suffering of many of our people.

We may choose to remain where we are, optimistically holding on to a future vision of an independent Hawaii.

Or we may choose to move forward taking a step which has the potential to create greater autonomy and self-governance for Native Hawaiians, thereby improving the socio-economic conditions of our people. I choose this option and that is why I strongly support S. 2899 which has the primary intent to protect Native Hawaiian programs and trusts, while formally recognizing Native Hawaiians as an indigenous peoples with the right to self-determination.

The majority of our people support the intent of the bill. A Hawai'i poll was conducted by a respected research organization in April of this year. Over 401 residents of Hawaiian ancestry were polled. The margin of error from the results was 4.9 percent, meaning that 95 percent of the time, if the entire adult Native Hawaiian population were sampled their responses would be within 4.9 percent plus or minus of those obtained in the poll.

One of the questions in the poll asked, *“Do you think Hawaiians should be recognized by Congress and the federal government as a distinct group, similar to the special recognition given to American Indian tribes?”* Eighty-seven percent answered “Yes”.

Another question asked, *“There is much talk about the creation of a sovereign Hawaiian nation, or a Hawaiian government of some kind that would represent the Hawaiian people in their dealings with the state and the federal government and would work for the betterment of the Hawaiian people. Do you agree or disagree that an entity of some kind should be formed?”* Seventy-two percent stated that they agreed. Finally, when a question was posed asking if Hawaii should break away from the United States and become an independent nation, seventy-two percent answered “No”. While Native Hawaiians feel wronged by the overthrow of the monarchy and other injustices, they do not want to separate from the United States.

The recent Supreme Court decision in Rice vs. Cayetano underscores the need to resolve longstanding issues facing Native Hawaiians such as political status and self-determination. The challenge to federal programs and other benefits to Native Hawaiians, even the Native Hawaiian trusts, is imminent. Through Senate bill 2899, the many acts of Congress that have enabled assistance to Native Hawaiians through numerous organizations and programs are afforded some measure of protection.

ALU LIKE, Inc., the organization that I work for, is the largest 501(c)(3) private nonprofit that provides services to Native Hawaiians statewide. We have seventeen programs in the areas of education, job training, social development, and business/economic development. Every year, ALU LIKE provides services to over 10,000 Native Hawaiians.

The Native Hawaiian Youth Offender Employment Demonstration Project - Hui Ho`ona`auao in na Opio Project (HHOP) provides services to court-referred youth in Hilo on the big island which include Ho`oponopono, remediation, GED preparation, computer literacy, job training and cultural education.

Mark Cohen, Ph.D. from the Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University has developed a model of determining the monetary value of saving a high risk youth. His studies assign values to certain behaviors associated with high risk youth. For example the value of diverting a high risk youth who has dropped out of school is \$291,000.

HHOP conducted a 32 month study of 19 court-referred youth in their program who were at risk of dropping out of school. Using Mr. Cohen’s model, HHOP has returned \$7.37 in value for each dollar provided by the government (\$5,529,000/\$750,000). Viewed another way, if the HHOP had only diverted 3 youths from dropping out of school, the project would have justified its costs ($\$5,529,000/19 = \$291,000$ average value per youth $\times 3 = \$873,000$ versus \$750,000 government funds).

From 7/1/99 to 12/31/99, the ALU LIKE Employment & Training Program placed 354 Native Hawaiians in jobs for a total placement rate of 71%. The return on investment was calculated at 1173% (see attached).

The above-mentioned programs are only a few examples of the benefits gained from federal support. There are many more programs and organizations that have helped thousands of Native Hawaiians. Every time a Hawaiian family is able to move into a home on Hawaiian homelands; health and medical services are provided to a Hawaiian who is sick through the programs funded by the Native Hawaiian Health Act; prenatal and early childhood education is provided as a result of the Native Hawaiian Education Act; or the Office of Hawaiian Affairs supports various efforts such as legal services through the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation for a Hawaiian family seeking to stay on their land, a Native Hawaiian individual or family gains pride and self-respect. They move closer to becoming healthy, productive citizens.

In order to have even greater impact, Native Hawaiians need to build a strong economic foundation and have control over our land and resources, our education, and our governance systems. We need to demand a higher quality of leadership and build valuable relationships both within and outside Hawaii. Senate bill 2899 provides the vehicle and opportunity for the United States to rectify past deeds and live up to its obligation to make things pono (right). The time is now. We have been waiting for over one hundred years. For Native Hawaiians, this is history in the making.

Chairman Nighthorse and committee members, I thank you for your support, and urge you to do all that you can to help this bill get passed.